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The Long Litany of Espionage

American Spies Sell Out Their Country for Many Reasons

By John Mintz
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Some have done it for love, and some for money. Others have become spies for the thrill of living a double life. A Navy ensign tried to sell national secrets because he needed cash to buy a car. An aerospace executive recounted that after he got a divorce and declared bankruptcy, he was an easy target for Polish intelligence agents who "found a fool who needed money."

One Pentagon aide confessed to authorities that he decided to sell classified documents about Asia "to prove . . . I could be a man and still be gay."

Some spies have appeared to their neighbors to be typical Americans who paid their mortgages, mowed the lawn and drove their children to soccer practice. But the recent history of American espionage also is filled with morose beings, misfits, malcontents and alcoholics. Hostile intelligence agencies often exploit their hang-ups brilliantly.

These spies have badly damaged national security in various ways over the past generation, an examination of recent espionage cases shows. The Walker spy case and the recent arrests of former CIA employe Sharon M. Scranage and Ghanaian national Michael A. Soussoudis are only the latest in what authorities say is a disturbing trend.

The United States has seen an upsurge in spy cases lately because Soviet bloc agents have become increasingly aggressive in recruiting spies, and because of a mid-1970s government decision to prosecute more cases, intelligence experts say. There were only a few spy prosecutions in the 1960s, as federal authorities often concentrated on turning spies into double agents. There have been 38 prosecutions since 1975.

Committing espionage against the United States can be a lonely existence and, judging by the tearful pleas of convicted spies at sentencing procedings, a devastating one.

"The sorrow and remorse I feel are beyond words," Northrop Corp. engineer Thomas Cavanagh told a judge last year after pleading guilty to trying to sell blueprints for the Stealth bomber to the Soviets. "I shamed my father's honorable name."

Federal Judge Matthew Byrne Jr. wondered aloud why a good family man would do what Cavanagh did. "What we ponder is what made this not-bad man do this extremely bad thing," Byrne said. Then he sentenced him to two life terms.

While some American spies get big money from their spymasters—James Harper received $250,000 from Polish intelligence for information about U.S. missiles, for instance—William Kampiles' experience was more common. A former CIA trainee, Kampiles sold the Soviets an extremely sensitive manual on a reconaissance satellite for $3,000.

Intelligence specialists say that the damage done by spies usually is not known until a war, when a nation may discover that its enemy easily jams its radar or outmaneuvers its weaponry.

It is "standard" for United States officials to stress how low-level a spy was, and the insignificance of his or her betrayal, according to a recent book, "The New KGB," by two former U.S. intelligence officials, William R. Corson and Robert T. Crowley.

Playing down spy cases serves not only to spare embarrassment to officialdom, but also to reassure the public, the book says.

Here are nine U.S. spy cases that show the United States' vulnerability to espionage.

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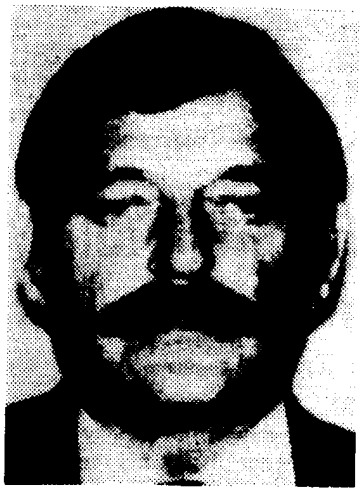
WILLIAM HOLDEN BELL



William Holden Bell, an engineer with Hughes Aircraft Co. in Los Angeles, was an easy victim for spy recruiters, Pentagon officials say.

"Ripe for recruitment," a recent Defense Investigative Agency report concluded.

For Bell, 1976 was a terrible year. He divorced his wife of 29 years, and, facing alimony of $200 a week, declared bankruptcy. His 19-year-old son had died in a camping accident the year before. And at work he'd been shunted to a second-rate job.

That was when he met Marian Zacharski, a Polish businessman in the same apartment complex. The two hit it off, playing tennis and socializing frequently.

In 1978, Zacharski sought Bell's advice in making contacts at Hughes. Bell helped out, and Zacharski paid him $5,000 as a "consultant." Then he got Zacharski such items as the company's in-house newsletter. At some point, Zacharski started asking for classified material. That was what one FBI official later called Bell's "dividing line."

Zacharski was an operative of Polish intelligence assigned to get high-tech secrets.

Bell, who worked on tank radar, told authorities he never discussed with Zacharski what really was going on. But by 1979, Bell said he realized he was committing espionage. He told authorities he may have made as much as $470,000.

For more than a year, Bell photographed documents at work and took them to Polish agents in Europe. The material dealt with such subjects as NATO air defense systems and radar systems in U.S. tanks and F-15 jets.

He told officials that at a meeting with a Polish agent in Innsbruck, Austria, he received a veiled threat. "He told me that I had a lovely family. Then he said that . . . if anybody got out of line, that he'd take care of them."

In over his head, Bell confessed to FBI agents in June 1981. They had been alerted because of the company's suspicions about his foreign trips.

Cooperating with the FBI, Bell wore a recording device to a meeting with Zacharski, who was later arrested. Zacharski received life imprisonment, but last month the United States swapped him and three other East bloc spies for 25 persons associated with the West.

Because of his cooperation, Bell was sentenced to only eight years in prison.

In a recent study, defense officials concluded that Bell "felt genuinely trapped" by the threats, his need for money and the charm of Zacharski, who "worked with extreme caution and practiced subtlety."

"There is little left of my life now," Bell told a Senate committee recently. "But I feel I am freer in prison than I was with Zacharski."

MITCHELL AND MARTIN

TASS PHOTO VIA UNITED PRESS INTERNATIONAL

William Martin, left, and Bernon Mitchell at 1960 Moscow news briefing.

The National Security Agency, the United States' code-maker and code-breaker, is one of the nation's most secret outfits, but in the early 1960s it was rocked by spy cases that called its security into question.

The worst involved two friends, William H. Martin and Bernon F. Mitchell, NSA mathematicians who left work in July 25 years ago for a vacation together. They said they were driving to the West Coast to visit their families.

They turned up Sept. 6, 1960, at a Moscow news conference blasting the "unscrupulous" NSA for spying on other nations.

They also praised the Soviet Union for being pro-women, adding that Russian women were "more desirable as mates"—a peculiar statement for them because investigators later established that they were homosexuals. Both stayed in Moscow.

Government officials at first said the pair had had no access to important information, but congressional investigators disputed that.

"Both men were described as being bright, and both were quite knowledgeable of NSA activities and personnel," said a Defense Intelligence Agency report. "It must be assumed that they willingly told the Soviets everything they knew following their arrival in Moscow."

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JOSEPH HELMICH

The story of Joseph Helmich has a moral: The FBI gets its man—even 17 years later.

Helmich was an Army code specialist stationed in Paris in the early 1960s. And he had serious financial problems. His debts were so bad that superiors threatened him with court-martial.

That's when he walked into the Soviet embassy in Paris.

Over the next year, Helmich earned $131,000 supplying the Soviets with coding secrets and equipment. To impress him, they gave him a medal and the rank of Soviet army colonel at a secret ceremony.

Friends then said they were suspicious about his sudden wealth, but U.S. investigators couldn't prove anything. He retired from the Army a few years later.

But in 1980 Helmich, working for a tile company and short of cash, tested his luck again. He visited the Soviet embassy in Ottawa to ask for more money. Canadian investigators spotted him.

Confronted by the FBI, he confessed over the course of nine interviews, then pleaded guilty to supplying the Soviets with code secrets. He told the judge that all that time he had been living a "private hell." He was sentenced to life imprisonment.

Helmich's code information was "priceless" to the Soviets in monitoring U.S. military operations in the Vietnam War, said the book, "The New KGB" by Corson and Crowley. Officials said he may have cost many American lives.

EDWIN G. MOORE

Intelligence agencies have a reputation for being tough on employes who raise suspicions. But that's not what happened in the case of Edwin G. Moore II of Bethesda.

Moore, who joined the CIA in 1952, left the agency in 1961 when he was charged with burning down a North Carolina motel he owned. After repeated trials and final acquittal in 1967, he was rehired personally by then-CIA Director Richard Helms.

After a tour in Vietnam, Moore returned to the United States experiencing what CIA doctors described as "paranoid-like" traits. But he was kept on the payroll until he retired in 1973.

Two years later, CIA officials suspected privately that Moore was responsible for an unsigned letter to then-Director William Colby threatening release of the names of 5,000 CIA employes to "the opposition" unless some veteran CIA personnel were promoted.

It didn't end there. On Dec. 21, 1976, an employe at a Soviet residence in the District found a package outside and, fearing it was a bomb, called police.

Authorities found it contained a photocopied CIA telephone directory, eight other CIA documents, a demand for $3,000 to be dropped at a specific time and place, and offers to identify CIA covert employes and give other information for $197,000.

FBI agents, pretending to be Soviets, made a "drop" at the designated time and place, near Moore's home, and watched as he retrieved it. A search of his home yielded hundreds more CIA documents, from almost every room.

Moore pleaded not guilty by reason of insanity, but he was convicted of attempting to sell documents to the Soviets. He was sentenced to 15 years in prison.

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JAMES HARPER

Employes of Systems Control Inc., a defense contractor in Palo Alto, Calif., should have guessed something was wrong with Ruby Schuler, the company president's secretary.

In 1981, Schuler was sipping vodka at her desk before lunch, jetting to weekends in Mexico, and once was seen with a stack of $100 bills at a bank. But coworkers didn't pry.

Schuler had a secret. For years she'd been stealing documents from the office and copying them at home. Her husband, James Harper, an electronics engineer, was selling them to Polish intelligence.

Between 1979 and 1981 Harper met a dozen times with Polish agents in Warsaw, Vienna and Mexico, and received $250,000.

But Harper was playing another tricky game. In 1981 he started meeting with a lawyer—without identifying himself—and tried to negotiate immunity from prosecution. For two years Harper sent the FBI and CIA anonymous messages through the attorney in an effort to become a double agent.

But with the help of a source within Polish intelligence, investigators identified Harper. After his 1983 arrest, investigators found numerous classified documents in his safety deposit box in Tijuana. Schuler had died before Harper's arrest.

The material Harper sold dealt with U.S. defenses against ballistic missile attack and the survivability of Minuteman missiles. The Army described Harper's national security damage as "beyond calculation."

In April 1984 Harper pleaded guilty to selling classified documents to the Poles. Federal Judge Samuel Conti in San Francisco, noting Harper expressed no sorrow or regret, sentenced him to the maximum, life in prison.

"You are a traitor to your country," Conti said, "who committed the crime not for any political reasons, but for greed."

CHRISTOPHER BOYCE

Some U.S. intelligence specialists say that, of all recent U.S. spies, none frightens them as much as Chris Boyce and his drug dealing friend, Andrew Daulton Lee. Experts see them as symbols of the alienated 1960s generation who "have as much contempt for Americans as for the Soviets," said one Senate intelligence specialist.

Both were upper-middle-class young men from suburban Los Angeles, both were bright (Boyce had an i.q. of 142), and both were bored.

Boyce's father, a retired FBI agent, got Boyce a job in 1975 through a former FBI colleague at TRW Systems Inc., a California defense contractor. At 21, Boyce was working as a clerk in TRW's "black vault," designed for secure communications between the CIA and TRW.

Shocked by what he learned about CIA operations overseas, Boyce sent Lee to contact the Soviet embassy in Mexico City. Boyce then started removing documents, photographing them at home and sending them via Lee to Mexico and Vienna.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Boyce shows photo of work area to Senate subcommittee earlier this year.

Over two years, they sold the Soviets an array of documents about extremely sensitive U.S. satellites and communications techniques for about $70,000.

Lee, late in meeting his Soviet contacts for one last delivery in Mexico City, stupidly went to the embassy there and threw a note over the fence. He was arrested by Mexican police.

Boyce was arrested in January 1977 at the University of California's Riverside campus where he was in a Chinese studies program—the KGB had urged him to enroll as a long-term spy project.

Lee was sentenced to life imprisonment, and Boyce to 40 years, which was increased by 28 years after he escaped from prison in 1980 and spent 19 months as a fugitive.

"No American who has gone to the KGB has not come to regret it," Boyce told a Senate Committee in April. "They are bringing down upon themselves heartache more heavy than a mountain."

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ROBERT LEE JOHNSON

Retired Navy warrant officer John A. Walker Jr. is hardly the first alleged spy to be turned in by an anguished wife. A telephone call to investigators in 1964 from the wife of Army Sgt. Robert Lee Johnson ended one of the nation's strangest spy rings.

In 1953, Johnson, stationed in Berlin, was angry that he hadn't been promoted. He met with Soviet agents, who trained him in spy techniques.

Johnson recruited a friend, James Mintkenbaugh. The two received $250 a month from the Soviets for years.

Working at missile sites in Europe and at Fort Bliss, Tex., Johnson gathered missile diagrams, plus a sample of rocket fuel.

Over the years, he and Mintkenbaugh communicated with the KGB with messages in hollowed-out razors, shoe heels and cigarette lighters.

Johnson was transferred to a military installation outside Paris, a shipment point for code gear and NATO communications. He removed batches of material from a secret vault and photographed and returned them.

A recent Defense Intelligence Agency report said the damage in losing this material was "extremely serious and long-lasting."

Meanwhile, the Soviets ordered Mintkenbaugh to marry a Soviet woman—despite his homosexuality—and to establish a real estate business. He set up shop in Arlington, and for years he told the Soviets about government employe customers.

Johnson deserted from the Army in 1964, and his wife telephoned authorities. Johnson and Mintkenbaugh received 25-year sentences. Mintkenbaugh said he was "one of God's mistakes and should have died as a baby," the DIA said.

In May 1972, Johnson's son Robert Jr., 22, a Vietnam veteran who hadn't seen his father for years, visited him at the federal penitentiary in Lewisburg, Pa. In the visiting room, the son pulled a knife and stabbed his father in the chest, killing him.

WILLIAM KAMPILES

Ex-CIA Director Stansfield Turner said he finds the William Kampiles case "terrifying" because Kampiles, a 23-year-old former CIA watch officer, betrayed the United States not for money, but "for kicks."

Recruited to the CIA from Indiana University in 1977, Kampiles, the son of immigrant parents and a one-time altar boy, wanted to be a covert agent.

But he found his CIA job routing message traffic to be boring. When he didn't get a transfer after a year, he quit.

And when he left, in anger he took a top-secret manual giving detailed workings of the extremely sensitive KH-11 "Spy in the Sky" satellite.

He later said that he sold the manual to an agent named "Michael" at the Soviet embassy in Athens for $3,000.

The CIA became concerned when Kampiles wrote to a former CIA colleague that he had been in contact with the Soviets and that they were seeking information. Kampiles offered to give them "disinformation" as a CIA double agent. Later he told former colleagues that the Soviets already had given him money, and CIA suspicions increased—the KGB doesn't give money for nothing.

Convicted of espionage in 1978, Kampiles was sentenced to 40 years in prison.

His information ruined a major U.S. intelligence coup, officials said. The Defense Intelligence Agency said a main reason he betrayed his country was that he was "egocentric."

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DAVID BARNETT

When the FBI rang the doorbell of David Barnett's Bethesda home in April 1980, his wife Sarah was shocked. Her husband had been keeping her in the dark about some things. He'd put the $92,000 he got from the Soviets in a separate banking account.

Barnett worked for the CIA for 12 years, most of it posing as a U.S. diplomat in Indonesia.

He resigned in 1970 and set up an exporting business, but it foundered, and by 1976 he had debts of $100,000. That was when he approached the KGB in Indonesia. Over three years, he sold detailed information about CIA operations in Indonesia and the names of CIA informants.

In 1977, he went to Vienna, Austria, and was debriefed fully by top KGB agents. He told them everything he knew about the CIA, including insights on why Soviet SAM missiles had been unable to hit B-52s over Vietnam, and the names of KGB agents the CIA had tagged as potential recruits.

The Soviets ordered Barnett to get a job with the White House or a congressional committee, and he moved to Washington. But by then, investigators had a hunch he was spying. So the CIA rehired him to teach recruits about resisting interrogation—to keep an eye on him.

U.S. agents spotted Barnett meeting the KGB in Vienna, Austria, in April 1980, and days after that the FBI came by his home. Three days later, his wife had a stroke while washing the family car.

He pleaded guilty to selling secrets to the Soviets and was sentenced to 18 years in prison.

Friends at the time of his arrest described Barnett as detached, aloof and unfeeling.

One described him as a man who "always looked like he had a secret."